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Mayor will review plans for bridge

Developers, residents again at odds over Rosslyn Road construction

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Houston Mayor Bill White is looking into whether he can stop construction of a bridge at the end of Rosslyn Road, one block north of Bethlehem Street, that some residents fear could be the beginning of a major thoroughfare through their neighborhood.

The mayor's involvement is the latest development in the residents' nearly five-year fight to prevent construction of the bridge.

Developers Tom Shepard and Alvin Freeman have obtained all the required permits to build the bridge, linking Candlelight Estates to the 43-home subdivision they plan to build on a 17-acre tract north of Bethlehem and south of Pinemont Drive.

The bridge, which would be built over a drainage ditch, would serve as the entryway for the new subdivision, Candlelight Place Section 3, where homes would be sold for \$250,000 to \$400,000.

"The mayor is receptive to the idea of stopping the bridge," said Frank Michel, communications director in the mayor's office.

"He is going to have a review done (of the project) and weigh the options.

"It may be there are no good options, or the options are very costly."

Opponents say they fear the bridge will open the way to Rosslyn becoming a major thoroughfare and will destroy the safety and tranquility of their neighborhoods.

But the developers say their subdivision will likely prevent Rosslyn from becoming a thoroughfare because plans call for the road to be blocked off at the north edge of their development.

"It's not going to go any farther than our subdivision," Shepard said.

RESOURCES

AT A GLANCE

- **What:** A developer is making a second attempt to link an established subdivision to a proposed 43-home subdivision by a bridge. Some residents fear more traffic. The mayor is investigating.
- **Where:** The end of Rosslyn Road, one block north of Bethlehem Street, linking Candlelight Estates to the 43-home subdivision developers plan to build on a 17-acre tract north of Bethlehem and south of Pinemont Drive.
- **When:** The developers said construction of the bridge and subdivision are scheduled to begin in about 45 days. That could change if the city chooses to intervene.

"We were able to get Rosslyn Road abandoned, so everybody should be thanking their lucky stars."

The developers could have avoided building a bridge at Rosslyn by putting an access to Candlelight Place at Pinemont, where there is light industrial activity, said resident Ray Bush.

Instead, the developers chose an entryway through Candlelight Estates to increase the value of their development, he said.

"The developers had free access to Pinemont and Del Norte (Street) and got variances, so the only way out was Rosslyn," Bush said.

The developers said construction of the bridge and subdivision are scheduled to begin in about 45 days. That could change if the city chooses to intervene.

This has involved a legal battle over the first design of the bridge, which residents feared would cause flooding. The developers later redesigned the bridge, so that it would not block water flow in the ditch.

The developers sued residents for delaying the project, but a Harris County civil judge dismissed the case.

The mayor instructed the city's legal, housing and public works departments last week to review the bridge project at the behest of District A City Councilwoman Toni Lawrence, who has championed the residents' cause.

"I have all along been against changing a neighborhood for the profit of a developer," said Lawrence, referring to Candlelight Estates. "I'm not happy that the developer got the permits, especially when he had other directions to go."

Resident Jack McReynolds said the situation illustrates a trend in the planning department of favoring developers over residents.

"What we are really fighting is procedural problem (in the city) of sliding things through," McReynolds said. "Every decision the planning department has made has been from the development side, but it's probably technically legal."

They have collected about 3,200 signatures opposing the bridge, including residents from Candlelight Estates, Acres Homes, Ella Lee Forest and Oak Forest.

About 130 people turned out for a meeting last week to come up with a strategy to stop the bridge.

"We don't want that bridge," said Aileen Crafton, who has lived in Candlelight Estates for 55 years.

"We have enough traffic here already."

Some residents, however, are in favor of the bridge.

"Cities can go through anywhere with eminent domain, but the city and the developer say they plan to block off Rosslyn at the north end of the (Candlelight Place) subdivision," said Phil Obenhaus, Candlelight Estates resident.

"The subdivision will provide a buffer north of Candlelight Estates. If the developer didn't put in residential, the property likely would have been commercial."



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